DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 058 EA 022 771

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Mutchler, Sue E. |
| TITLE | Eight Barriers to Changing Traditional Behavior: Part One. Insights on Educational Policy and Practice, Number 18. |
| INSTITUTION | Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, Tex. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| PUB DATE | Mar 90 |
| CONTRACT | 400-86-0008 |
| NOTE | 6p.; For part two, see EA 022 772. |
| PUB TYPE | Collected Works - Serials (022) |
| JOURNAL CIT | Insights on Educational Policy and Practice; n18 Mar 1990 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Change Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Participative Decision Making; *Resistance to Change; *School Based Management; School Restructuring |

ABSTRACT

Implementing shared decision making in school-based management requires fundamental changes in traditional behavior. Initiation of restructuring systemic authority and decision-making arrangements requires changing deeply held beliefs and developing new roles and relationships. A recent survey of educational practitioners identified eight major barriers to change, which include: (1) fear of taking risks; (2) fear of losing power; (3) resistance to changing roles and responsibilities; (4) lack of trust; (5) lack of definition and clarity; (6) inadequate or inappropriate resources; (7) lack of skills; and (8) lack of hierarchical support. The first five are discussed in this first of a two-issue report; the last three are examined in the second issue. (LMI)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Number 18 March 1990

# Eight Barriers to Changing Traditional Behavior: Part One

ED330058

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Wilson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 022 771

INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Number 18 March 1990

# Eight Barriers to Changing Traditional Behavior: Part One

*Implementing shared decision making in school-based management requires fundamental changes in traditional behavior. For a system to initiate a restructuring of its authority and decision-making arrangements, it must change deeply held beliefs and promote the development of new roles and relationships. A recent survey of educational practitioners conducted by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has revealed eight major barriers to changing traditional behavior when initiating shared decision making. The following is the first of a two-issue report on the survey findings.*

## Barriers to Changing Practice

It has been suggested that the ability of school-based management to bring about enduring school improvement hinges on how effectively it is linked with shared decision making (*INSIGHTS*, Number 16, Dec. 1989). When considering the wide difference between behaviors practiced in hierarchical organizations and those required in participatory organizations, it becomes evident that implementing shared decision making requires changes in traditional attitudes and behaviors on the part of people throughout the school community. Districts choosing to implement these changes will encounter a variety of impediments.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) conducted a survey of educational practitioners in 1989 to identify the difficulties that confront schools and districts when initiating shared decision making. Survey respondents reported a number of difficulties they encountered or observed in trying to change traditional behavior. Eight major barriers to changing traditional behavior, derived from an analysis of these data, are as follows:

1. **Fear of taking risks**
2. **Fear of losing power**
3. **Resistance to changing roles and responsibilities**
4. **Lack of trust**
5. **Lack of definition and clarity**
6. **Inadequate or inappropriate resources**
7. **Lack of skills**
8. **Lack of hierarchical support**

## Fear of Taking Risks

Nineteen percent of the SEDL survey respondents reported a fear of risk-taking among site participants. Their observations tended to be brief and generalized descriptions of uneasiness, such as "fear of change," "apprehension," "fear of the unknown," and "resistance to change." One respondent stated, "Some people are resistant to change...are not risk-takers"—apparently assuming that fear of risk-taking should be an expected response to change from some people in any organization. Another respondent linked fear of risk-taking with the concerns people have regarding interpersonal relations. The fear of alienating someone may restrain some individuals from expressing their opinions. A third respondent discussed risk-taking in the context of overall program development at the site, stating that: "Although all the parties (School Board, superintendent, teachers' union) openly and repeatedly encour-

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 E. Seventh Street, Austin, Texas 78701 (512) 476-6861

aged [schools involved in] school-based-management/shared-decision-making to dream and take risks (without retribution for failures), more creative waiver requests and budget utilizations were not pursued until the second and third year of the pilot."

### Fear of Losing Power

People in decision-making positions in the school and district can experience a fear of losing power as they move from a traditional hierarchical decision-making model to a shared decision-making model. Thirty-eight percent of the SEDL survey respondents stated that people at their site—particularly principals, central office staff, and school board members—had to confront and overcome the fear of losing power. School boards are fearful that school site councils will become the final decision makers in school matters. Building administrators are fearful of losing control or "giving away the store." Similarly, in discussing central office staff, one survey respondent stated that "understanding that sharing decision making does not really disenfranchise Central [office staff] is a very difficult concept for some to grasp."

> ..."*Shared decision making can occur without any parties relinquishing their values and responsibilities or 'losing face'.*"

The fear of losing power was also reported among staff and parents who may have built bases of informal influence in the school or district. One respondent observed that these teachers and parents may fear the consequences of trading the security of an established relationship with a single administrator for uncertain influence as "one among many" on a school council.

Power is not only an authority or control issue. It also encompasses some individuals' sense of self and status. One survey respondent stated that a major barrier to changing traditional authority relationships was convincing principals and central office staff that their positions would not be done away with entirely, nor would they be relegated to mere "managers of facilities." Another respondent asserted that the challenge at his/her site was to convince participants that "shared decision making can occur without any parties relinquishing their values and responsibilities or *losing face.*"

### Resistance to Changing Roles and Responsibilities

A third barrier to changing behavior is participant resistance to changing traditional roles and responsibilities. The redistribution of authority at the school site demands that administrators, teachers, parents, and community members forge different roles and accept new responsibilities. Fifty-one percent of respondents to the SEDL survey reported resistance among people in the school community to accepting change in this area. Four sources of resistance were discussed:

- reluctance to assume new responsibilities
- apathy
- satisfaction with the status quo
- dependence on norms and role expectations

A majority of respondents who discussed resistance to changing traditional roles and responsibilities observed an unwillingness among teachers to assume responsibilities different from those they traditionally have held. Respondents offered a variety of interpretations for this reluctance: teachers lack confidence in their ability to participate, they are unwilling or unable to devote the time necessary to participate, they prefer that administrators make the *difficult* decisions, or they fear increased personal accountability. In examin-

ing this resistance over time, some respondents observed significant changes. For example, one stated that "over the three-year period of this project we noticed that, at first, teachers were reluctant to share their ideas, but as they became more comfortable with their roles they became true leaders." Another noted, "In the beginning, the newly empowered decision makers were, in many cases, frightened by the responsibility and the danger of being held responsible for mistakes. Most of these fears have been overcome [since that time]."

Several survey respondents discussed two passive sources of resistance: (1) apathy toward shared decision making and (2) satisfaction with the status quo. Each of these behaviors adds weight to any active resistance within a school community to changing traditional roles and responsibilities.

Finally, barriers to changing roles and responsibilities also are found in the deeper, often unspoken role expectations of teachers, administrators, and parents. Strong norms exist regarding what it means to *be* and behave in each of the established roles. People have a broad range of attitudes regarding change in traditional roles and these attitudes can provide the foundation for overt resistance to formal changes in responsibilities. More than one-third of the respondents who reported resistance to changing roles and responsibilities discussed these normative barriers. SEDL survey findings in this area are in line with the contention by Malen et al. (1989) that "the failure to alter orientations and norms inhibits participants from taking on new roles or fully participating in site decision making."

**Lack of Trust**

Thirty percent of SEDL survey respondents discussed a fourth barrier, lack of trust, that is encountered as participants grapple with the consequences of changing power and assuming new roles and responsibilities. The building of new roles and relationships required for shared decision making can uncover the existence of mistrust in every relational permutation possible. Survey respondents most frequently described a perceived mistrust of district-level personnel on the part of teachers and building administrators.

Given an atmosphere of mistrust and apprehension, it is not surprising that a few survey respondents who discussed this barrier identified the need for site participants to air grievances. One respondent stated that "trivial matters stored up over the years from lack of input" impeded progress at their site. Another observed that "some decisions previously made at district or administrative levels require major complaining sessions before movement can be made."

**Lack of Definition and Clarity**

People must be provided with clear definitions of a concept or strategy and its operational implications in order to engage in successful implementation. Thirty-eight percent of the survey respondents stated that certain aspects of shared decision making lacked definition or clarity in their district. Three areas in particular were most frequently discussed:

- the shared decision-making concept
- vision and beliefs
- roles

Many respondents reported a lack of clear definition of the concept itself—indicating that there needs to be a *common language* and a set of understandings about shared decision making and its implications in the day-to-day *"normal* way of conducting school business."

Others stated that their district lacked a clearly defined, shared vision of an educational system—a vision that encompasses both desired learning outcomes for students and a redefi-

nition of teaching and administration for faculties and principals.

Finally, a number of respondents reported that people experienced difficulty defining the new roles, responsibilities and relationships required in shared decision making. One suggested that this may remain a challenge over time; successful shared decision making requires a "constant clarification of each role and the individual responsibilities that accompany decentralization."

## Conclusion

Practitioners across the nation who are engaged in school-based management and shared decision making are encountering common barriers to changing traditional behavior among the members of their learning communities. *Fear of taking risks, fear of losing power, resistance to changing roles and responsibilities, lack of trust,* and *lack of definition and clarity* are five of eight barriers identified through the analysis of Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's survey results. The April issue of *INSIGHTS,* Number 19, will discuss the other three barriers: *inadequate or inappropriate resources, lack of skills,* and *lack of hierarchical support.*

## References

Malen, B., Ogawa, R.T., & Kranz, J. (1989). *An analysis of site based management as an educational reform strategy.* (An occasional policy paper sponsored by the FOCUS Project). Salt Lake City, UT: Department of Educational Administration, University of Utah.

This issue of *INSIGHTS* was written by Sue E. Mutchler, SEDL Policy Associate, and is based on research synthesized in the SEDL publication, *Organizing the educational system for excellence: Harnessing the energy of people* (in press).

INSIGHTS, *SEDL's update on innovations and emerging topics related to educational policy and practice, is produced by ED-AIDE, a policy information service project, and by Theme C, Improving Teacher and Administrator Performance.*

SEDL || OERI

*This publication is based on work sponsored wholly, or in part, by the Office of Educational Research & Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract Number 400-86-0008. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.*



BEST COPY AVAILABLE